



Key to
Āl 'Imrān

Resurgence of the Ummah

ABDUR RASHID SIDDIQUI

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In Precious Memory of
Our Dearest Brother *Khurram Murad*

A Trustworthy Guide and Mentor Whose Absence is
Keenly Felt. May Allah Bless His Soul. *Amin.*

Transliteration Table

Consonants. Arabic

initial: unexpressed medial and final:

ء	د d	ض d	ك k
ب b	ذ dh	ط t	ل l
ت t	ر r	ظ z	م m
ث th	ز z	ع	ن n
ج j	س s	غ gh	ه h
ح h	ش sh	ف f	و w
خ kh	ص s	ق q	ي y

Vowels, diphthongs, etc.

Short: ا a إ i ؤ u

long: آ ā ؤ ū إي ī

diphthongs: ؤ aw

أي ay

Contents

	vii
Foreword	ix
Preface	i
<i>Sūrah Āl 'Imrān</i>	2
The Placement of Āl 'Imrān	3
A Comparison of <i>al-Baqarah</i> and Āl 'Imrān	7
The Personality of a <i>Sūrah</i>	9
The Central Theme of Āl 'Imrān	
The Structure of Āl 'Imrān	11
Section 1	
Verses 1-32: The Basics of Divine Guidance	12
Section 2	14
Verses 33-63: The Family of 'Imrān chosen by Allah to serve His Cause	
Section 3	15
Verses 64-120: <i>Da'wah</i> to the Jews and Christians and their Intransigence; the Mission of the Muslim <i>Ummah</i>	

Section 4

Verses 121-189: A Critique of the Battle
of Uhud and Guidance for Future Strategy

17

Section 5

Verses 190-200: Conclusion:
Moral and Spiritual Resources

22

Some Major Themes

Purity of the Heart

25

Worldly Allurements

25

The Qur'anic Concept of Dynamics
of Power and Change

26

The Obligation of *Da'wah*

27

Relations with the Jews and Christians

29

The Law of Tests and Trials

30

Shūrā (Consultation)

32

34

The Relevance of *Āl 'Imrān* in Our Time

35

Further Reading

39

Foreword

IT IS INDEED a pleasure for us to bring out *Key to Āl 'Imrān: Resurgence of the Ummah* in the *Treasures of the Qur'ān Series* and as a sequel to the author's earlier work *Key to al-Fātiḥah: Understanding the Basic Concepts* which was well received as a highly useful guide to the Qur'ān. Brother Abdur Rashid Siddiqui, who has devoted much of his time to the study of the Qur'ān and has worked closely with British Muslim youth as their mentor, largely succeeds in enabling readers to gain or renew their acquaintance with the message of the Qur'ān. *Key to Āl 'Imrān* offers a conspectus of the major themes and brings out effectively and energetically the relevance of this *Sūrah* to our times. This goes a long way in kindling the spirit of assimilating the message of the Qur'ān. Its study of the *Sūrah* in terms of its sections affords a helpful overview of the whole *Sūrah*, which contributes to its better comprehension.

Patterned after the late Brother Khurram Murad's pioneering works in this genre, such as *Way to the Qur'ān* and *Key to al-Baqarah: The Longest Surah of the Qur'ān*, Brother Siddiqui's work aims at capturing the essence of the *Sūrah*, elucidates its main concerns and places the *Sūrah* in the overall context of the eternal guidance embodied in the Qur'ān. In so doing, Brother Siddiqui has painstakingly gleaned valuable material from authentic *tafāsīr* in Arabic and Urdu. Being familiar with the mindset and intellectual needs of English-speaking Muslims in the

West, he has done a commendable job in drawing them closer to the Qur'an, which alone ensures their success in both the worlds. There was a pressing need for producing such works on the Qur'an in English, which could cater for Muslims in the West. It is heartening to note that Brother Siddiqui has responded positively to this need and produced this valuable work. Since its inception the Islamic Foundation has been engaged in bringing out works which may enable readers to gain a better, sharper understanding of things Islamic. The present work constitutes a substantial effort in this direction. I am sure this work will be read with much profit both by specialists and the general public alike.

I take this opportunity to thank all my colleagues at the Foundation who have been associated with its production. May Allah reward the author and grant us the ability and strength to draw upon the invaluable guidance contained in the Qur'an, which this work seeks to state clearly. (*Āmīn*)

Ramādān 1422 A.H.
December 2001

Dr. M. Manazir Ahsan
Director General

Preface

IN THE LAST year of his life (1996) our respected Brother Khurram Murad (may Allah have mercy on him) published a booklet giving an overview of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* as well as its major themes. In his own words his sole aim was, "to make the message of the Qur'an, and its summons to live by it, reach the hearts and minds of readers" (p. 6.) His death so soon after its publication, deprived us of his so many talents and not least his ability to expound the message of the Glorious Qur'an so as to penetrate the hearts of his listeners and readers.

Efforts are afoot to edit and publish his very many unpublished manuscripts. So far the Islamic Foundation has published his trilogy on the Qur'an and the life and message of the Prophet Muḥammad *ṣallallāhu 'alaihi wa sallam*¹ entitled: *The Quranic Treasures, Gifts from Muhammad* and *Who is Muhammad*. His two other works in English both recently published are: *In the Early Hours: Reflections on Spiritual and Self Development* and *Dying and Living for Allah*. His works in Urdu are also being published in Pakistan posthumously. Thus, we are fortunate to benefit from his scholarship and advice even after his death. I have no doubt this *Sadaqah Jarriyah* will continue and may Allah in His infinite mercy forgive his shortcomings and elevate him to *Jannat al-Firdaws*. (*Āmīn*)

¹ It is customary to recite the salutation after the names of prophets. It means, "May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him". In the rest of the book it is abbreviated as "saṣ".

Still there is a need to continue the work to which he had devoted his life. One very important area was his love for and devotion to the Book of Allah. Although in his modest way he used to disclaim any pretence of deep knowledge and scholarship in this field, those who knew him and had the privilege of listening to his *Dars-e-Qur'ān* knew his erudite scholarship and deep insight into Qur'ānic knowledge. His book *Way to the Qur'ān* is immensely popular and has guided a great many young people to undertake Qur'ānic studies.

I must admit that I am a novice in the field of Qur'ānic sciences. I am conscious of my lack of competence to undertake this task. Yet last year when I made a brief presentation, following the pattern of Brother Khurram Murad on *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, I was persuaded by many well-wishers and friends to compile this booklet so as to continue the work of our learned friend and mentor.

I have tried to follow Brother Khurram Murad's methodology and pattern and attempted to present an overview of *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*. In this, I have tried to cover areas which were so dear to him. His purpose was to make the Holy Qur'ān accessible to the masses and facilitate its understanding. Thus making the Qur'ān relevant to our lives and the life of the *Ummah* so that we may receive guidance from this Divine source. For a proper understanding of the Qur'ān studying reliable *tafāsīr* (commentaries) and self-reflection are essential. Yet there is also a need to have clear perspectives of the *sūrahs* as well. Of course, some *tafāsīr* also provide this information. Usually, however, these are not expounded in great detail. Although there are voluminous Qur'ānic literatures available in the Arabic and Urdu languages, there is a paucity of reliable *tafāsīr* (commentaries) in English. Unfortunately, there are also only a few commentaries in English dealing with the aspect of the *naẓm* (internal

arrangement) of the *sūrahs*. I have given a selection of commentaries that can be consulted for further study in the Bibliography. This compilation is for young men and women who ardently desire to understand the Qur'ān and want to live by it.

I would like to thank Professor Khurshid Ahmad, Professor Salman Nadvi, Dr. Abdur Raheem Kidwai and Adil Salahi for meticulously reading the entire manuscript and offering many valuable comments. I am also grateful to Maulana Sohaib Hasan, Dr. Ataullah Siddiqui, Farooq Murad and Zahid Parvez for their constructive suggestions for improving the work. Whatever errors there are, I alone am responsible for them. May Allah *Subḥānū wa ta'ālā*² forgive me. I am very grateful to Dr. Manazir Ahsan, the Director General of the Islamic Foundation for publishing this book and writing a Foreword to it. He also kindly checked the diacritical marks for the Arabic words. I am also grateful to Dr. Susanne Thackray for her editorial suggestions. Not least, my thanks are due to Naiem Qaddoura for typesetting the manuscript and Nasir Cadir for the cover design.

I hope and pray that Allah (*swt*) may bless this humble effort and that it may inspire and stimulate interest in the study of the Holy Qur'ān in our younger generation.

Leicester

1st Ramadān 1422

17th November 2001

Abdur Rashid Siddiqui

² This phrase praises Allah and will subsequently be abbreviated as (*swt*).

Sūrah Āl 'Imrān

SŪRAH ĀL 'IMRĀN is the third *sūrah* following *al-Fātiḥah* and *al-Baqarah*. It is composed of 200 verses. Together with *al-Baqarah* these *sūrahs* form about one-eighth of the Holy Qur'ān. *Āl 'Imrān* is not a continuous narration. Many *mufasssirūn*, (commentators), believe that the first part of the *Sūrah* was revealed after the Battle of Badr (2 A.H./624 C.E.) and the last part was certainly revealed after the Battle of Uḥud (3 A.H./625 C.E.) The section dealing with the family of 'Imrān is specifically addressed to the Christians, and according to some *mufasssirūn* was revealed in 9 A.H./630 C.E. when a delegation of Christians from Najrān, Yemen visited the Prophet (*saws*) in Madinah.

Sūrah Āl 'Imrān covers a very volatile period in Islamic history after the Prophet's migration to Madinah. It extends from 2 A.H./624 C.E. at the end of the Battle of Badr to the aftermath of the Battle of Uḥud 3 A.H./625 C.E. It provides a graphic record of the circumstances and prevailing atmosphere of the events and psychology of the different groups of people involved. At the time of its revelation, the Muslim community was settling into their new surroundings. This period was covered by *Sūrah al-Baqarah* in which guidance was provided about the performance of religious duties as well as about legal, economic and social obligations. Then, the Battle of Badr took place and which afforded a decisive victory. This Muslim victory against all odds and with scarce manpower and resources strengthened and

reinforced the Islamic faith. The very first confrontation with the Makkans that gave the Muslims their success might also have given them a false sense of security. They might have assumed as believers, that they would be victorious in every encounter. However, the laws of success and defeat designed by Allah are not so simplistic and superficial. For achieving success there are many prerequisites which must be met. In addition to unflinching faith there have to be both mental and physical preparations, organisational skills, discipline and arms and equipment. This is the lesson Allah taught the believers at Uhud.

The Placement of Āl 'Imrān

Khurram Murad discussed the reasons for the arrangement of the *sūrah*s as we find them in *Mushaf (al-Qur'ān)*. They are not in the chronological order of revelation but are rather arranged by the Prophet (*saws*) under Divine direction. He directed the scribes to insert a certain section of revelation in a specific *sūrah* that had been revealed earlier. Those who are interested in understanding the reasons behind this arrangement should refer to Khurram Murad's *Key to al-Baqarah*, which contains a full discussion on this subject.

So why is *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān* placed after *Sūrah al-Baqarah*? According to Mawlānā Amin Aḥsan Islāhī (may Allah be pleased with him) (d.1997) every *sūrah* has a partner. All *sūrah*s are arranged in pairs. Like partners, there are similarities between them and they also complement each other. If there is a gap in one *sūrah*, the other fills it. If something is hidden in one, the other manifests it. They shine like the sun and moon. In long *sūrah*s we see these features in *al-Baqarah* and *Āl 'Imrān*; in short *sūrah*s we can observe them in the last two *sūrah*s, numbers 113 and 114, which are collectively called *al-Mu'awwadhatayn* (seeking Allah's refuge from all evils). The Prophet (*saws*) used to recite them in

pairs, for example *Sūrah al-Qiyāmah* in one *rukū'* and *al-Insān* in another, and similarly *Sūrah al-Ṣaff* and *al-Jumu'ah* and *Sūrah al-A'la* and *al-Ghāshiyah*.

According to Mawlānā Islāhī there are some exceptions about this pairing of *sūrah*s, for example *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* has no partner – being in itself the introduction to the whole Qur'an. Incidentally, one of the names of *al-Fātiḥah* is *al-Kāfiyah* indicating that it is self-sufficient and does not need pairing. In some cases, a later *sūrah* is the continuation of the preceding *sūrah* or its appendix. For example *Sūrah al-Tawbah* is the continuation of *Sūrah al-Anfāl* and the same relationship exists between *Sūrah al-Mu'minūn* and *al-Nūr*. There are other examples as well.

A Comparison of *al-Baqarah* and *Āl 'Imrān*

Looking at the similarities between *al-Baqarah* and *Āl 'Imrān* we observe that both deal with the same subject matter, the affirmation of the Prophethood of Muḥammad (*saws*) especially addressing the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (the People of the Book – the Jews and the Christians). Both *Sūrah*s discuss at length the fundamental teachings of *dīn*, its essential message and mission. Both begin with the same *Hurūf al-Muqatta'āt* (the abbreviated letters) *Alif Lām Mīm* and both end with very effective supplications. *Al-Baqarah*'s introductory verses mention those qualities of people who are God-conscious (*muttaqīm*) and who will prosper (*muflihīn*). *Āl 'Imrān* concludes its narration with *muttaqīm* and *muflihīn* as well (3: 200).

The Prophet (*saws*) compared them to the sun and the moon. Abū Umamah al-Bahili reports that the Prophet (*saws*) said: "Recite the Qur'an, it will be the intercessor for its companions. Recite the two luminous ones – *al-Baqarah* and *Āl 'Imrān* – for on the Day of Resurrection they will come as two clouds or canopies

(full of light), or two flocks of birds in ranks, pleading for those who recite them." (Muslim and Ahmad as quoted in *Mukhlās Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Vol. 1, p.26.)

One may well ask why, if there are so many similarities in the subject matter and style, *al-Baqarah* was placed before *Āl 'Imrān*. On reflection one can see some possible reasons for this arrangement. The reasons are discussed very well by Mawlānā Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī in his *tafsīr* (commentary). Firstly, there is a great emphasis on *īmān* in *al-Baqarah*, right from the start until it finishes. The *Sūrah* starts with:

Who believe in the existence of that which is beyond the reach of human perception, who establish Prayer, and spend out of what We have provided them, who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you, and have firm faith in the Hereafter (2: 3-4). It concludes with: The Messenger believes, and so do the believers, in the guidance sent down upon him from his Lord: each one believes in Allah, His Angels, His Books and in His Messengers... (2: 285).

Islam is the main topic of discussion in *Āl 'Imrān*. Thus throughout the *Sūrah* there are references to submission to Allah. For example:

The Dīn with Allah is Islam (submission to His Will) (3: 19); Do they now seek a Dīn other than prescribed by Allah even though all that is in the heavens and earth is in submission to Him – willingly or unwillingly... (3: 83); ... and to Him do we submit (3: 84); And whoever seeks a way other than this way of submission (Islam), will find that it will not be accepted from him... (3: 85); and Believers! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and see that

you die not save in a state of Islam (submission to Allah) (3: 102).

Thus, in *al-Baqarah* the essence of *īmān* is explained and in *Āl 'Imrān* the characteristics of Islam are expounded. Whereas in *al-Baqarah* there is an invitation to *īmān*, in *Āl 'Imrān* the invitation is to the system of life based on *īmān*. As *īmān* precedes Islam so for this reason *al-Baqarah* is placed before *Āl 'Imrān*. The words *īmān* and Islam are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to our Dīn and Faith. But there is some difference between these two very important terms. Whereas Islam is the Code of Life and System of Beliefs which distinguishes itself from other religions and ways of life, *īmān* is the creed and Faith whose acceptance makes a person Muslim or Mu'min.

Second, the principal addressees in *al-Baqarah* are one group of *Ahl al-Kitāb*, the People of the Book, the Jews, whereas *Āl 'Imrān* is directed mainly at the other group, the Christians. Historically, the Jews preceded the Christians; hence this placement is in chronological order. Similarly, the stories of Adam and Ibrāhīm and Mūsā (peace be upon them all) which are mentioned in *al-Baqarah* are narrated before the stories of Maryam, Zakariyā, 'Isā and Yahyā (peace be upon them all) who came later and are mentioned in *Āl 'Imrān*. However, the address throughout the *Sūrah* is directed at the People of the Book. This common term includes both groups.

Third, in *al-Baqarah* arguments for basic beliefs (*Tawḥīd*, *Ākhirah* and *Risālah* – the Oneness of Allah, the Hereafter and Prophethood) are drawn from nature. These are more convincing to unbelievers as well as to the *Ahl al-Kitāb*. The first address in *al-Baqarah* is:

O mankind! Serve your Lord, Who created you as well as those who came before you, so that you may become

righteous. It is He Who has made the earth a resting-place for you, and the sky a canopy; and sent down water from the sky to bring forth fruits for your sustenance. Do not, then, set up rivals to Allah when you know (the truth) (2: 21-22).

Again in verse 164 arguments from nature are presented as:

In the creation of the heavens and the earth, in the alternation of night and day; in the vessels that sail across the sea with what is useful for mankind; in the water which Allah sends down from the sky giving life to the earth after it had been lifeless, causing all manner of living creatures that He scatters through the earth; in the change of winds, and the clouds pressed into service between sky and earth – (Here) indeed are signs for those who are wise (2: 164).

By contrast, in *Āl 'Imrān*, most of the arguments are drawn from Allah's (*swt*) attributes. These are more suitable for the *Ahl al-Kitāb*, as they believe in the Creator. Thus, the *Sūrah* starts:

Allah! There is no deity save Him – the Ever-living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal (3: 2); ...and Allah is exalted in Might, Lord of Retribution (3: 4); and He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases, there is no deity but Him, the Exalted in Might, the Wise (3: 6).

Further, in verse 18, Allah (*swt*) presents His Own testimony and that of the angels and persons with knowledge:

Allah Himself bears witness that there is no deity but Him and likewise do the angels, and those endowed with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no deity but Him, the Exalted in Power, the Wise (3: 18).

Many of Allah's attributes are stated in the following supplication:

Say: "O Allah! Lord of power (and Rule), You give power to whom You please and You strip power from whom You please. You endue with honour whom You please. And You bring low whom You please. In Your Hand is all Good. Verily over all things You have power. You cause the night to gain on the day and cause the day to gain on the night. You bring the living out of the dead and You bring the dead out of the living. And You give sustenance to whom You please without measure" (3: 26-27).

Of course, more comprehensive listings of Allah's attributes are in 2: 255 and 59: 22-24. This approach is more effective for the *Ahl al-Kitāb* who proclaim their belief in God.

Finally, *al-Baqarah* marked the establishment of the Islamic *Ummah* and heralded the change of leadership from *Banī Isrā'īl* towards the Islamic *Ummah* (2: 143), and *Āl 'Imrān* spells out the favours bestowed on the Islamic *Ummah* in the discharge of that succession: the building of the *Ummah*, the establishment of the Islamic society, the clash between the *Ummah* and its adversaries. Whereas *al-Baqarah* ushered in the appointment of the Islamic mission and its leadership role, *Āl 'Imrān* presents the *Ummah* in its preparation for that role.

The Personality of a *Sūrah*

We have discussed above that *sūrahs* are arranged in pairs. But each *sūrah* of course, has its own theme and subject matter that it conveys to its readers. It also supplements/complements the preceding and the following *sūrahs*. Sayyid Qutb compared *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān to human beings. Just as all human beings are essentially the same yet each have their own distinctive and individual features. He writes:

Every *sūrah* has a theme and a target that it carries forward for its subject throughout and conveys it to its readers. *Sūrahs* of the Qur'ān are like human beings. Just as all human beings are the same yet each one has his own individual features that separates him from others. Each one has specific physical characteristics and individual personality. Among human beings some may have only slight differences that separates them while in others except for basic and common human characteristics nothing is similar. Thus, people differ from each other despite all being humans.

I am in the habit of understanding the Qur'ān in the same way and my feelings for the Qur'ān are similar. Thus, this is how I treat it according to my feelings. I have a very long association with the Qur'ān, deep love, great likeness and long relationship. Thus, after long reflection and deep thought I have ascertained the personality, tendency and features of each *sūrah* distinctly.

Thus, I perceive in the *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān different models. My personal relationship with each *sūrah* has created a specific flavour. I see each *sūrah*'s physical form, tendency and its inclination differently.

My relationship with *sūrahs* is similar to my relationship with my friends. Every one of my friends is a friend and I love and adore all of them. Everyone is precious to me, yet with each of them the human heart creates a different relationship. With each one finds a different joy. Each has a different influence and effect and one treats each one of them differently.

When a person enters a *sūrah* it is like beginning a journey. Each *sūrah* presents different scenes and perspectives. From each immersion in it one finds new

treasures and new ideas. The journey of each *sūrah* is a journey to a New World and the goal of this journey and its signposts are all clearly marked.

(Introduction to *Sūrah al-A'raf* in: *Fi Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 2, pp.1122-23; translated into Urdu by Sayyid Ma'rūf Shāh Shīrāzī.)

This long excerpt conveys how we can ascertain the central themes of each *sūrah* and how we should perceive the whole *sūrah* as an entity. Its internal arrangement presents a cohesive unity rather than a disjointed collection of *āyāt* (verses).

The Central Theme of Āl 'Imrān

Every *sūrah* is a unit that is well knit and provides messages and meanings consistent with its theme. In this way, every *sūrah* has a central theme, around which all its contents are woven.

Let us note the historical perspective in which this *sūrah* was revealed. Its revelation came at a time when Islam had gained ground and it was not possible for the *Ahl al-Kitāb* to oppose it openly. Although some of them accepted Islam it did not penetrate their hearts. Others were still opposing it.

It was during this period that the Battle of Uhūd took place in which the Muslims suffered heavy losses. This affected the attitudes of both groups of *Ahl al-Kitāb*. Those who were hypocrites turned back from Islam and those who opposed it openly became very hostile.

So the Battle of Uhūd was a test for all – the Muslims, the hypocrites and the *Ahl al-Kitāb*. It was during this critical time that this *sūrah* was revealed. Hence, it contains criticism of all the groups. It highlights the cause of the Muslims' defeat and gives guidance on how to overcome this temporary setback and turn it into victory.

In my view the central theme of the *sūrah* is very similar to that of *al-Baqarah*. It outlines the mission of the Muslim *Ummah* that is chosen to lead mankind. Thus, the *sūrah* helps to inspire them and to prepare them for this important task. The theme is clearly stated in verse 110:

You are now the best of peoples brought forth for (the guidance and reform of) mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah (3: 110).

In *al-Baqarah* the *Ummah* is characterised as *Ummatan Wasatan*, a middlemost, a just and a model community (2: 143), but here the *Ummah* is honoured as *Khaira Ummah*, the best community (3: 110). Not because of their intrinsic value but rather for the importance of the task – the task for which hitherto prophets had been selected to perform. In *al-Baqarah* the duty of the *Ummah* is described as being a “witness unto mankind”. In this *sūrah*, *Amr bil M’arūf wa al-Nahī ‘anil Munkar* (commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong) is assigned as its duty. In *al-Baqarah* the address is to the whole of mankind whereas here the address is to those who believe and they are told, “Fear Allah as He should be feared” (3: 102).

In *al-Baqarah* incidents from Jewish history are presented highlighting the neglect of *taqwā* (God consciousness) by the Jews that led to their disgrace. Here, Christian history is presented to show how they went astray from the Right Path – the path of *taqwā*. Thus, in both *Sūrahs* there are lessons for *Ahl al-Imān* (the believers) as to how they should safeguard their faith and not lose their quality of *taqwā*.

As there is no prophet to come after Muhammad (*saws*) it is the duty of this *Ummah* to be a witness unto the truth and guidance given by Allah.

As we know, the guidance in the Qur’an is for all humanity, yet special groups are addressed and invited to reflect on their history and deviation from the Right Path. In *Sūrah al-Baqarah* the special address was directed at the Jews and in *Al ‘Imrān* the Christians are the main addressees. But if we reflect deeply we will observe that there are subtle differences in the manner of addressing them. In both the *Sūrahs* there is a critique of the Jews and Christians. However, there are differences in the style of criticism. In *al-Baqarah* the criticism is direct (2: 40-123). In *Al ‘Imrān* the criticism is indirect. In *al-Baqarah* Allah Himself addresses them and invites them to accept and follow His *Dīn*, the same *Dīn* which He revealed earlier to the prophets of *Banī Isrā’īl*. Now after completion of *Hujjah*, proof, they do not deserve to be addressed directly by Almighty Allah. This is the indication of Allah’s displeasure with them. Therefore, He addresses the Prophet (*saws*) that he should convey this to them. Thus, there are several verses in this indirect mode:

So if they dispute with you say: “I have submitted my whole self to Allah and so have those who follow me.” And say to the People of the Book and to those who are unlearned: “Do you (also) submit yourselves? ...” (3: 20).

If anyone disputes in this matter with you now after (full) knowledge has come to you, say: “Come! Let us gather together our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves: then let us pray and invoke the curse of Allah on those who lie” (3: 61).

Say: “O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah...” (3: 64).

Say: "O People of the Book! Why reject you the signs of Allah, when Allah is Himself witness to all you do?"

Say: "O People of the Book! Why obstruct you those who believe, from the Path of Allah..." (3: 98-99).

These are marked differences from the address that appears in *al-Baqarah*. This is evident from the passages cited above.

The Structure of Āl 'Imrān

On reflection, one finds that the *Sūrah* can be divided into five well-defined sections. These can be further sub-divided into sections for the sake of understanding. According to my understanding these sections are as follows:

- Section 1 Verses 1-32 (32 verses) The Basics of Divine Guidance
- Section 2 Verses 33-63 (31 verses) The family of 'Imrān chosen by Allah to serve His Cause
- Section 3 Verses 64-120 (57 verses) *Da'wah* to the Jews and Christians and their intransigence; the Mission of the Muslim *Ummah*
- Section 4 Verses 121-189 (69 verses) A Critique of the Battle of Uhud and Guidance for Future Strategy
- Section 5 Verses 190-200 (11 verses) Conclusion: Moral and Spiritual Resources

Section 1: Verses 1-32. The Basics of Divine Guidance

The *Sūrah* begins with the attributes of Allah – His Power and Glory as well as His Mercy in providing Guidance to mankind throughout human history. Six attributes of His that are

mentioned (The Living, The Self-Subsisting, Eternal, Exalted in Might, Lord of Retribution, The Wise) in verses 1-6. From these it is argued that He is the Sole Creator and Lord. This emphasises the belief in *Tawhīd* – the Oneness of God. He is the One, Who has guided humanity through His messengers and His Books and it is He Who will also judge us on the Day of Resurrection. Thus, all Articles of Faith are covered here.

Verses 7-17 portray the mental attitudes of those who are deprived of Divine guidance. It is contrasted with the characteristics of those who find *hidāyah* (Guidance) in His Book. The characteristics of those who fail to receive Guidance are that they seek discord in Divine Revelation and that they pursue the hidden and esoteric meanings instead of concentrating on the manifest and obvious meanings. Hence, as they deny the signs of Allah instead of receiving Guidance, they are left to go astray.

In contrast, the characteristics of the believers are that they sincerely endorse everything revealed by Allah. They constantly seek His Forgiveness and Mercy. They do *istighfār* (seeking Allah's Forgiveness) for their shortcomings. They show patience (*ṣabr*), firmness and self-control. They are true in their words and deeds. They worship devoutly and spend in the way of Allah and seek His forgiveness in the early hours of the morning. These qualities open their hearts ready for receiving Guidance (verses 16-17).

This sub-section (verses 18-19) culminates in the testimonies of Allah, His angels and those who are endowed with knowledge of the affirmation of *Tawhīd* (the Oneness of Allah). Thus, the only *Ḍīm* acceptable in the sight of Allah is Islam.

The next sub-section (verses 20-27) is a criticism of the People of the Book, as they have not fulfilled the role for which they were appointed. Hence, they are stripped of the *Imāmah* (leadership) of nations. This is ably expressed in a moving supplication, which can be compared to a similar supplication in *Sūrah al-Isrā'*:

And pray: "My Lord! Cause me to enter wherever it be with truth, and cause me to exit wherever it be with truth, and support me with authority from Yourself." And Proclaim: "Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Surely falsehood is ever bound to vanish" (al-Isrā' 17: 80-81).

Finally, in verses 28-32, there are instructions and warnings for the Muslim *Ummah* that they should not have intimate friendships with the *Ahl al-Kitāb* and the hypocrites but that they should rather seek the company of the believers and obey Allah and His Messenger.

Section 2: Verses 33-63. The Family of 'Imrān chosen by Allah to serve His Cause

The Family of 'Imrān was honoured by such luminaries as Zakariyā, Maryam, Yahyā (John, the Baptist) and 'Isā (peace be on all of them) as Allah honoured the family of Ibrāhīm before them. Verses 33-47 narrate the story of Maryam in great depth and explain how she came to be under the care of the Prophet Zakariyā. This is followed by the narration of the miraculous births of the Prophets Yahyā and 'Isā (peace be upon them). The story of the Prophet 'Isā (peace be upon him) is also told in *Sūrah Maryam* (Chapter 19). There, a lengthy account of his miraculous birth is narrated in detail but not of his mother. Here, in keeping with the theme of the *Sūrah*, that account is condensed but his message and the devotion of his disciples are described in more detail. This account rejects the notion of the Prophet 'Isā's divinity and on the contrary it affirms his humanity and honours him as a Messenger of God. The family of 'Imrān was chosen by Allah from *Banī Isrā'il* to convey His Message to the rest of mankind.

The Prophet 'Isā (peace be upon him) was in the line of prophets sent to *Banī Isrā'il* and his message to them, like all earlier messengers, was: "*Fear Allah and obey me*" (3: 50). Verses 48 to 63 provide the proof of his humanity, his Prophethood as well as his miracles to convince *Banī Isrā'il* of the truth of his assignment from Allah. Yet they denied him. He was betrayed by a conspiracy, but Allah raised him to the heavens and saved him from their scheming (3: 55). The whole issue of attributing divinity to him is resolved by stating:

The case of 'Isā in the sight of Allah is the same as the case of Adam. He created him from dust and then said to him, "Be" and he was (3: 59).

However, his followers lost his teachings and attributed divinity to him. They were challenged to a *Mubāhalah*, a solemn meeting, to determine who was telling the truth. This by praying humbly together to Allah and invoking His wrath and curse on those who lie (3: 61). This was later proposed to a delegation of Christians who visited the Prophet in Madinah in 9 A.H./630 C.E. However, the Christian delegation refused to take part in the joint prayer to establish the truth regarding 'Isā's (peace be upon him) divinity. On this basis many commentators are of the opinion that these verses were revealed at that time.

Section 3: Verses 64-120. Da'wah to the Jews and Christians and their intransigence; the Mission of the Muslim Ummah

The Qur'an provides the basic guidance on how to approach people of different faiths. The key issues to be raised should be those areas where there is mutual agreement. Following this guidance when the Prophet (*saws*) approached Heraclius (610-641 C.E.), the Roman Emperor, he appointed Dihyah ibn

Khalīfah al-Kalbī his ambassador and sent a letter to him in which he invited him to Islam and quoted verse 64. As the *Ahl al-Kitāb* claimed to believe in One God they were invited to worship Him alone without associating others in His Divinity (3: 64). The other common bond is the unifying personality of the Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) who is held in esteem by all – the Jews, the Christians, the pagan Arabs and Muslims. As Patriarch Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) preceded all other prophets it is suggested that all should follow his life-example and teachings. Historically, Judaism, Christianity and Paganism came much later. The Qur'an maintains that the Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) was neither a Jew nor a Christian nor a Pagan but was rather of a true faith submitting to the will of Allah (verse 67). In this verse, the Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) is introduced by explaining both the positive and negative aspects of his personality. He was not a Jew nor a Christian or a Pagan but he was *Hanīf* and a Muslim (submitting to the Will of God). *Hanīf* literally means one who turns away and moves towards the other way. This word is used in opposition to *mushrik*, one who associates others in Godhead. Therefore, the real followers of Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) are those who like him believe in Allah and bow to His Will (3: 68). This is followed by a passionate and effective address to the People of the Book (3: 69-71). These verses expose the real motives of the People of the Book and their undeclared objectives by stirring up the controversies surrounding the Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him). They sought to mislead and distract the Muslims from the true path of Islam and create doubts in their hearts.

Further verses (72-80) follow the same theme as in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*. These expose the Jews' plots and mischief making against the believers. It reminds them of the blessings that Allah gave them and yet they still remained ungrateful. Their whole

attitude was to debase Allah's Message and disregard the Covenant. It should be observed that the Holy Qur'an is very fair in its criticism of the Jews and Christians. When examining their ethical standards and their honouring of agreements, it acknowledges that there is no doubt in the integrity and honesty of many of them. But there are some who are not to be trusted (verse 75).

In verses 81-99 the Prophethood of Muḥammad (*saws*) is presented as the continuation and culmination of the line of prophets who came earlier and they acknowledged his Prophethood. Thus, Islam is the same as revealed to Ibrāhīm and his progeny as well as to the Prophets Mūsā and 'Isā (peace be on all of them).

The final subsection, verses 100-120, lays down the mission of this *Ummah*. It is their duty to hold fast to the Rope of Allah and be not divided. They should keep steadfast on the path of piety. The *Imāmah* (leadership) of nations is now transferred to the Muslim *Ummah* and it is their duty to invite mankind to the Path of Righteousness and forbid what is evil. They are warned that they should avoid the pitfalls of the *Ahl al-Kitāb* in performance of their duties (3: 105). Allah informs the Muslim *Ummah* of their rightful place in the world and their duty of guiding humanity. Allah (*swt*) says: "You are the best community that has ever been raised for mankind; you enjoin the doing of good and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in Allah" (3: 110).

Section 4: Verses 121-189. A Critique of the Battle of Uhūd and Guidance for Future Strategy

This is the crucial part of the *Sūrah* that makes a critical assessment of the weaknesses that the Muslim forces betrayed at Uhūd. Let us recapitulate what happened at this eventful encounter in the third year of the Hijrah.

The victory at the Battle of Badr in 2 A.H./623 C.E. was a miracle when a small force of Muslims defeated the Makkani army that was more than three times its size and much better equipped. Many high-ranking leaders of the Quraysh were killed in that Battle. Scores of them were captured. There was great anger and frustration in Makkah when the defeated army returned to the city.

The Quraysh were keen to avenge their ignominious debacle at Badr. In Shawwāl 3 A.H./624 C.E., Abū Sufyān, one of the Quraysh leaders, assembled an army of three thousand well-armed soldiers and marched to invade the tiny state of Madinah. The army camped near Mount Uhud, a few miles outside Madinah.

The Prophet (saws) consulted his Companions about how to meet this challenge. There were two options open to the Muslims: either to remain inside Madinah and defend the city or to move out towards Uhud to meet the enemy. Initially, the Prophet (saws) was in favour of remaining within Madinah. But the younger Companions who missed the Battle of Badr as well as a sizeable number of other Companions were eager to go out and fight. Finally, in the meeting with the Companions it was decided to get ready for a march to Uhud. The Prophet (saws) went home to make his preparations. He put on his chain armour and equipped himself to lead the Muslim army. In the meantime, his Companions felt that they had unduly forced their opinion on the Prophet (saws). When the Prophet (saws) came out fully attired for the fight, the Companions told him that they had changed their minds and accepted his earlier opinion to stay in Madinah. The Prophet (saws) said: "It does not befit a prophet to take off his fighting attire once he has put it on until God decides the fight between him and his enemies" (Sayyid Qutb: *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, Vol.2, p. 193, quoting from Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah's biography of the Prophet.) In this way, he taught his Companions

very important lesson about *Shūrā* – the process of consultation. There is a time for consultation before making a decision. Once a decision is taken the process of consultation should be over. Then one should have *tawakkul* – reliance on Allah. There should be no hesitation and the process of consultation should not start afresh unless there are some new facts to consider. In this case, there were none.

There was a small group of hypocrites within the Muslim society in Madinah. They were opposed to leaving Madinah to fight. Their leader, 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy, withdrew with his three hundred supporters from the Muslim army and thereby weakened the Muslim force. However, the Prophet (saws) with seven hundred Companions marched towards Uhud. The Prophet (saws) organised his force in different sections and selected a contingent of 50 archers to be stationed at a strategic position guarding a mountain pass from where the Muslims could be subjected to a surprise attack. Their duty was to guard this post and not leave it at any time whether the Muslims were winning the war or facing defeat.

The Battle started and initially the Quraysh were under pressure and started retreating and the Muslims captured the battlefield and were busy collecting the war booty. When the archers saw this they thought that the battle was over so many of them abandoned their posts and joined in with the others collecting the booty. They disregarded the instructions of the Prophet (saws) not to leave their post whatever the outcome of the battle. Khālid ibn Walid, a very shrewd and capable commander of the Quraysh who had not yet accepted Islam, saw the strategic point inadequately guarded. He took advantage of this lapse and mounted an attack from behind the Muslim ranks. This created chaos and panic in the Muslim army. The whole situation suddenly changed as the Muslims were attacked from

the front as well as from the rear. Then a rumour spread that the Prophet was martyred and this made the Muslims lose heart and become demoralised. Despite these setbacks a small band of Companions shielded the Prophet and managed to resist the enemy's onslaught. In the end, when the Quraysh could not make any further headway they withdrew, satisfied that they had avenged their defeat at Badr. The Muslim horsemen chased them several kilometres to vindicate their position. This represents a brief outline of what happened at Uhud.

The Qur'an does not relate the historical events as a mere record but brings out important lessons that have to be learnt from them. This is the way to make progress. The Qur'an provides glimpses of important events. It portrays the psychology of human beings and how people react in different situations. It also provides reasons for the occurrence of events. From these, basic principles can be deduced that provide believers with the eternal treasure of guidance.

The major reason for the severe setback at Uhud, as indicated above, was the lack of discipline and love of material things. *Jihād* and *infāq* (spending in the way of Allah) are closely linked. To remove the depression felt by the defeat and to uplift morale, verses 130-143 deal with the purification of hearts. The subject of *infāq* is preceded by that of the prohibition of interest; this is because they are the antithesis of each other. In *Sūrah al-Baqarah* as well the prohibition of interest and *infāq* are closely linked (2: 261-281) and both are preceded by the obligation of *Jihād*. Here the prohibition of interest comes before *infāq*. Again they are linked with *Jihād*. Furthermore *infāq* and *Jihād* play a key role in the rise and fall of the *Ummah*. The goal of the Muslims is to achieve forgiveness from Allah and to gain admission to *Jannah*. They should compete with one another in this noble pursuit and follow the way that pleases their Lord, undeterred by prosperity

adversity. They should be conscious of their duty all the time and be free of greed and miserliness. As their aim should be to seek Allah's pleasure and to avoid His wrath they will succeed in overcoming the human weakness for material wealth and its pursuit. They should freely pardon others and control their temper, and their souls should be seeking far superior rewards from their Lord. Thus, if they commit any sin or fall short of the required behaviour they should seek Allah's forgiveness. Who will graciously accept their repentance and reward them (3: 133-136). This is the Qur'anic methodology of *tazkiyah*, purification of the soul. Allah knows human weaknesses and carnal desires and, thus, is sympathetic to human beings yet trains them to aspire to higher goals and strengthens their resolve by promising His forgiveness and His reward.

Let us summarise the lessons to be learnt from the Muslim army's severe setback at Uhud. First, whatever happens in this universe happens by God's Will and Decree. God is the sole power behind all events. It was made clear to the Muslims – as they are the first addressees, the lesson is for all the succeeding generations – that all events occur by God's absolute and unrestrained directives. If they fear God and be patient He will grant them victory. Second, to achieve success, there are certain important qualities that should be instilled in the ranks of fighters. These are *sabr* (patience) and *taqwā* (God-consciousness). If the whole army is imbued with these qualities the enemy cannot penetrate its ranks (3: 120 and 122). Third, when embarking on *Jihād*, fighters should have absolute *tawakkul* (reliance) on Allah. Even if some weak-hearted Muslims or hypocrites withdraw, they should not lose heart. They were reminded that in the Battle of Badr despite their numerical disadvantage they succeeded because they relied on Allah's help. Indeed, Allah helped them by sending down an army of angels to

their aid (3: 125). Fourth, never be despondent and disheartened. If you have firm faith, you will be successful (3: 139). Fifth, this encounter was a test for you. Those who were killed in the way of Allah are not dead but are martyrs and live in Divine bliss. So you should not be afraid of laying down your lives (3: 168-171). Sixth, even if the Messenger of Allah were killed, you should continue your struggle. The Messenger is not superhuman; many earlier prophets died, yet their followers continued the fight. Everyone has to face death one day and its time is fixed so one should not be afraid of this eventuality (3: 144-148). Seventh, disregarding the instructions of the Prophet results in dire consequences. There should be absolute discipline in the army. The desire of acquiring the war booty should not be the purpose of *Jihād* (3: 152). Finally, though some of his Companions disregarded his instructions, the Prophet was instructed to be kind and forgiving towards his followers and to continue to consult them on important issues (3: 159).

Section 5: Verses 190-200. Conclusion: Moral and Spiritual Resources

Having suffered defeat at the Battle of Uhud, what resources are needed to strengthen the Muslim *Ummah* so that it can be triumphant in future encounters?

These concluding verses provide the moral and spiritual guidance that are prerequisites. They can be compared with the concluding verses of *al-Baqarah* (2: 284-286). The imagery presents the entire universe as an open book that directs those who possess understanding to the deeper purpose and objective of creation. When people reflect on the creation of heaven and earth and observe the alternation of day and night it leads those who possess wisdom to the existence of a Creator and to the purpose of creation that eventually directs them to certainty about

accountability on the Day of Judgement. They realise that this world is not a playground merely for entertainment nor did it come into existence by accident. It is rather the creation of the Wise and Mighty Creator. Hence, for those who are endowed with insight, their reflection will lead them to the Creator as well as to the ultimate end of the world and the imparting of justice in the Hereafter. This leads them to submit to the Prophet's call and to seek Allah's forgiveness and desire to be in the company of the righteous. All these are conveyed in the form of a beautiful supplication. As soon as it was made it received the approval of the Creator.

Dhikr (remembrance of Allah) should be synthesised with *Fikr* (deep reflection on Allah's creation) and not just mere repetition of certain words. Ibn Kathīr in his comments on verses 190-194 presented a number of devotional sayings extolling the virtue of contemplation. Hasan al-Baṣrī said, according to him, "An hour of contemplation is better than a whole night spent in prayers." Sayyid Qutb observes that the Qur'ān establishes a relationship between remembrance, worship and contemplation, rendering the latter an important part of worship.

Thus, *Tawhīd* (the Oneness of Allah) leads to *Ākhirah* (the Hereafter) and the realisation of accountability and the necessity of reward and punishment. Worldly life would be purposeless without the *Ākhirah* (the Hereafter). Reflection on creation is the primary source of guidance but the surer basis of *Imān* (Faith) is based on *Risalah* (Prophethood). The call of the Prophet echoed the call of the believers' own hearts and they willingly submitted, not needing to demand further proof or miracles.

As soon as this supplication was uttered it was accepted favourably by Allah. This indicates that if the prayers are said with sincerity and at an appropriate time they gain acceptance. Again, it is emphasised that whoever struggles in the way of

Allah, man or woman, they will receive their reward from their Lord. Those who have affirmed their faith in Allah should not be tempted by the glitter of the world and the prosperity of disbelievers as this is only a brief enjoyment for them. However, there will be struggles, trials and tribulations ahead. One must be ready for this.

As the preceding verses and the *Sūrah* as a whole is critical of the attitude of *Ahl al-Kitāb*, in the closing stages the Qur'ān praises those People of the Book who were firm about earlier revelations and accepted Islam; they are entitled to special praise and reward.

The last verse is one of the most comprehensive verses of the Qur'ān that encompasses all essential teachings required to implement the Islamic way of life and to succeed despite being engulfed by many problems. Instructions are clear that there should be patience (*ṣabr*) and firmness against all odds. In the *Sūrah* the instructions to the believers are to remain patient in adversity. They should struggle hard, remain firm and steadfast, not succumb to temptations and never listen to the defeatists or those who create discord. It is essential that as believers they should resist their desires, ambitions, weaknesses and failings. They should persevere on being faced by the weaknesses, perversion and deceit of others. They should be ready to face stiff opposition and falsehood. They will overcome if they remain patient and firm.

The verse then asks the believers to excel in *ṣabr* (*muṣābarah*), patience against one's enemies and opponents. They should overcome their enemies who try to exhaust their patience. In a prolonged struggle they should not fail but rather be firmer and more patient than their adversaries, whether these be external enemies or from within their own ranks. If they want to succeed against their enemies they should excel in their resolve and determination.

One has to remain alert and be prepared to meet the challenges from external threats. This readiness (*murābitah*) means that they should be in places where battles are expected and be alert to the manoeuvrings of their enemies in advance of any attack. They should always be vigilant in guarding the fortress of Islam both physically and intellectually. It is narrated by Salmān al-Fārisī that the Prophet (*ṣaw*s) said: "Vigilance for one day and night is better than the prayer and fasting of a whole month" (Muslim). And finally, *taqwā*, God consciousness, at all times is the essence of Din. It means desisting from all prohibitions and cautions and complying with all God's commands. Having enriched one with these valuable qualities one may expect *ṣalāh* - success guaranteed by Allah in this world and in the Hereafter.

Some Major Themes

We have explained the *Sūrah*'s overview and considered its central theme at some length which defines the mission of this *'Ummah* as enjoining good and forbidding evil deeds. For this purpose guidance is given to equip us with inner strength and moral qualities so as to fulfil our mission. There are certain other themes that need to be considered as well.

Purity of the Heart

Allah is the Creator and the Provider of all our needs, physical as well as spiritual. For our physical needs provisions are made on this earth so that we can fulfil them. For our moral and spiritual needs, as to how we should conduct our lives on this earth, Allah (*ṣaw*t) in His Mercy sent down revelations to His messengers to guide humanity.

In *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (2: 3) we are asked to believe in *'ālam al-ghayb*, the realm beyond the reach of human perception. This implies that there are two distinct spheres in the universe, *'ālam*

al-ghaib and *'ālam al-shahādah*, the world that we can perceive by our senses. The former includes such things as the nature of Allah, the angels, *Ākhirah* (the Hereafter), etc; these we cannot perceive with our senses. The Qur'an deals with both of these worlds.

Here two kinds of verses are mentioned. This of course does not mean that all verses fall into these two types only; these two kinds of verses are in contra-distinction to each other. The first one is *muhkamāt*, basic or fundamental, these are the foundation of the Book. Then, there are other verses called *mutashābihāt*, allegorical or ambiguous, and their meanings are not well established, as they relate to the Unseen. No one can fathom their real meaning except Allah. However, we are required to believe in all of them.

Those whose hearts are perverse turn their backs on the facts clearly stated in the Qur'an. Instead, they try to unravel those verses that are ambiguous by ascribing to them their own meanings. Often, they search the enigmatic verses for hidden meanings. On the contrary, those firmly rooted in knowledge and with purity of heart concentrate on those verses that are clear and unambiguous in their search for guidance. Very many sects that developed in the past and still exist today base their religion on *Bāṭin*, hidden meanings, with the result that they lead themselves and others astray into misguidance.

Worldly Allurements

Human beings by their nature are dazzled by the glitter and sparkle of material wealth and are attracted by worldly possessions. They usually desire a comfortable life, unlimited wealth and satisfaction of their carnal desires. Thus, the path of righteousness and restrictions on the unlawful acquisition of wealth seem difficult and arduous to them. Of course, Islam does not impose limits on the acquisition of wealth by lawful means

and the satisfaction of sexual desires within lawful relationships. It does not impose celibacy. Nor does it ask people to retire to jungles and caves to spend their whole life in meditation. Nor does it direct people to abandon this world to gain spiritual insight. Islam wants us to keep the right balance in our lives. Wealth, children, houses, cars or whatever else given to us are meant as a test to determine whether we use them in an appropriate manner or whether we are swayed by temptations and desires and transgress the path of piety.

It is but natural that Allah has made these things attractive for us. Yet it is for this reason that despite their glitter and charm we should not lose our sense of balance but should rather use them in the betterment of our lives and the lives of others. Throughout history we see that this imbalance in human affairs ultimately led to the destruction of magnificent civilisations. The reason being that they indulged in unbridled pleasures and luxurious life styles, neglecting Allah's commandments. On the other hand, we also observe that many religions imposed celibacy and abandonment of this world so as to gain spiritual enlightenment. As this harsh imposition was against human nature they could not succeed in their goals and corruption and deviation crept into their lives.

Islam guides us to the Middle Path or the natural path (*fitrah*). It takes into account human needs and requirements. Thus, it allows lawful accumulation of wealth and fulfilment of sexual desires within marriage. The reward for strictly following the Path of Righteousness is eternal bliss in Paradise where all human needs and desires will be fulfilled. Compared with those comforts and everlasting pleasures, worldly wealth and pleasures is *matā' qalīl*, a brief or a little enjoyment (3: 197). Thus, we should aspire for *Jannah* (Paradise) where all our desires will be satisfied and life in Heaven will be eternal, where we will also attain the pleasure of our Creator.

The Qur'anic Concept of Dynamics of Power and Change

The duty we owe our Creator is *'ibādah*. The root of this word is 'ABD meaning to become subservient, to be subdued and to be submissive. Hence, it is used for slave or servant. Thus, the literal meaning of *'ibādah* is to express utter humbleness, subservience and humility. This word not only means worship but obedience as well. The Qur'an asks us not to make anyone or anything partners with Allah (*swt*):

Serve Allah and join not any partners with Him
(al-Nisā' 4: 36).

Allah will forgive all other sins but not *shirk*, associating partners with Him.

Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgives anything else, to whom He pleases; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed (al-Nisā' 4: 48).

This also applies to unconditional obedience of Allah's commands and rejecting worship of as well as obedience to others. This is categorically stated in the Holy Qur'an:

For We assuredly sent a messenger in every community (to tell them): "Serve Allah and shun the Evil one"
(al-Nahl 16: 36).

... but if you obey them, you will surely yourselves turn into those who associate others with Allah in His divinity
(al-An'ām 6: 121).

Thus, the essence of *'ibādah* is to perform all acts of worship and service exclusively to Allah and to obey and follow His commands unconditionally and always remain His servant.

ence, *'ibādah* cannot be restricted to the few rites and rituals of worship, rather it is the totality of a person's life that should be spent in obedience to and in the service of Allah.

Allah (*swt*) is the real Sovereign and He holds exclusive Power in all affairs of the Universe. Thus, He can give power and ascendancy to whomsoever He likes. And He can take away power from whomsoever He wishes and impose disgrace on them (3: 26). The history of mankind gives ample proof of devastating upheavals happening all the time. The emphasis in this *Sūrah* is that sovereignty belongs to Allah alone. Of course transference of power is not done on whims nor haphazardly. Allah's decisions are just and based on *hikmah*, wisdom. He gives ample warnings and enough time for people to reform and adopt the way of righteousness. But when all warnings are ignored and people persist in corruption and injustice, then Allah's wrath strikes and one regime is replaced by another. This is the Qur'anic interpretation of human history that is markedly different from Capitalist or Marxist interpretations.

The Obligation of *Da'wah*

The obligation of *da'wah*, conveying the message of Islam to others, is a very prominent theme of this *Sūrah*. This is presented as an individual responsibility as well as a collective responsibility of the whole *Ummah*. Unless the whole of society is geared to inviting people to goodness and forbidding evil deeds, it is not possible to bring about change in society. As it is not always possible for everyone to engage in this noble task, there should at least be a dedicated group that undertakes it so as to absolve others from the strict liability of performing this duty.

In the *Sūrah* the specific emphasis is on *da'wah* to the People of the Book, i.e. the Jews and Christians. The methodology of *da'wah* to this group was discussed in Section 3 above.

The obligation of *da'wah* in the past was performed by the prophets of Allah (peace be upon them) and their Companions. Whenever humanity went astray from the Right Path another prophet or messenger was sent to bring them back to the Path of Righteousness. As our Prophet (*saws*) was the last of this illustrious chain of prophets and no further prophet will come, the task of keeping humanity on the Path of Righteousness was given to this *Ummah*. This is the reason that the *Ummah* is designated as "*the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong*" (3: 110). This honour was earlier given to *Banī Isrā'īl*. But they neglected and failed to fulfil their duty, hence this honour was then conferred on the Muslim *Ummah*. This is implicitly referred to in the form of a supplication in verses 26-27.

Relations with the Jews and Christians

The Qur'an is the eternal Book of Guidance which contains both gems of wisdom as well as laws and regulations for this *Ummah*. It provides guidance on dealing with all sections within human society. Relations with those who sincerely follow the ideology of Islam but who at times lapse into non-compliance of the Prophet's instructions, should be pardoned and treated kindly.

Then there are those who do not accept the Islamic faith but do not try to subvert the Islamic state by their secret manoeuvrings. Such People of the Book are singled out for praise (3: 113-117). The Qur'an acknowledges that they take their faith seriously. Hence, they should not suffer any disadvantage or hardship because of their faith. On the contrary, as protected persons (*dhimmīs*) their lives and properties are as sacred as that of believers. The *Sūrah* reassures them of receiving fair treatment.

Finally, there is another group which tries to subvert the Islamic state from within by creating discord and disharmony.

Relations with them are discussed in detail in the *Sūrah*. The believers are warned to be aware of their hidden agenda. The Qur'an exposes the hypocrisy of those who come in the guise of friends yet their hearts are full of malice and anger. Thus, they create doubts and misgivings in the minds of unsuspecting people. This was the role some Jews and Christians played from the outset. Some of them outwardly became Muslims but remained hypocrites through and through. The *Sūrah* specifically targets them and warns the Muslims not to obey them or befriend them. If the Muslims were to follow their advice, they would lead them astray (3: 100 and 118-20). The picture vividly portrayed in these verses records their inner feelings and outward appearance. Such hypocrisy can be observed in every society in every age. They profess friendship yet secretly try to disrupt and confuse, thus undermining the Muslims whenever they can. So the Muslims are warned not to develop any intimate relationship with such people.

Imām al-Rāzī (may Allah have mercy on him) raises an important question:

It may be objected that this verse prohibits categorically any interaction with rejecters of faith, yet God says elsewhere:

Allah does not forbid you concerning those who do not fight with you on account of your religion or drive you out of your homes, that you act kindly towards them and deal justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just. Rather Allah forbids you concerning those who fight with you... (al-Mumtahinah 60: 8-9).

How are these two injunctions to be harmonised? We answer that no doubt the specific must always come before the general. Thus God forbade the people of faith to take the rejecters of faith as close intimates. He then mentioned

the reasons for this prohibition. The first is, 'They would not spare no effort in causing you despair and confusion.' The second, 'they love to see you suffer'. The third reason is the hatred, which their mouths manifest and the final reason is the greater hatred, which they conceal in their hearts. (Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol.8, pp.210-213 as quoted by Mahmoud M. Ayoub in *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, Vol.2: The House o'Imrān, p. 303.)

This secret weapon of deception is still used by some present-day rejecters of faith. Yet the Muslims, even nowadays, maintain their intimate relationships with them.

For example, there has always existed a contingent of biased Orientalists around the world who in the guise of scholarship and learning, try to undermine the Islamic faith and its teachings. They have become very sophisticated in their approach. They start with showering praises on Islam and its Messenger to attract the sympathy of Muslims. Yet their real intent is to destroy the love and respect which the Muslims have for their Prophet (*saws*) and the Qur'an. These two remain the prime target of their poisonous criticism. They use all forms of literature whether history, novels, Qur'anic commentaries, *Ḥadīth* expositions or the *Ṣirah* of the Prophet (*saws*) as vehicles to further their cause. Their real purpose, in the garb of scholarship, is to erode and subvert the Islamic faith. Instead of being on their guard from such people the Muslims do not seem to learn the lesson. They open their hearts to them and treat them as close friends. Whereas Allah's revelations teach them, as it taught the earlier generation, how to frustrate their plans and plots. Allah's instruction is clear:

If you persevere and fear Allah, their cunning cannot harm you in any way. Allah encompasses all they do (3: 120).

The Law of Tests and Trials

The path of *Imān* is full of trials and tests to ascertain those who are sincere believers and those who just proclaim their faith either for ulterior motives or because they are weak in their commitment. This is stated explicitly in several places in the Qur'an (*al-Baqarah* 2: 155 and 214; *al-Ankabūt* 29: 2-3). It is stressed in several places in this *Sūrah* as well (3: 142; 152-153; 179 and 186).

Tests and trials bring out the best in people and strengthen those who are tried. Just as to purify gold it is put in a crucible and heated so that all its impurities are purged, similarly by enduring the tests and trials human personality is developed and shaped. It is resistance that brings out their full potential in human beings and consolidates it. Thus, the purpose of the testing at Uhud was to unmask those who were hypocrites among the ranks of the Muslims. Until then all sorts of people were part of the Muslim *Ummah*: the sincere as well as the weak-hearted and hypocrites. It was against the wisdom (*ḥikmah*) of God that "the best community" should be composed of such diverse people of faith. This community has to play a vital role in shaping the destiny of mankind, hence, it should not have among its ranks those who are hypocrites joining them under false pretences.

The victory at Badr trained the believers to be prepared to fight against heavy odds. The defeat at Uhud was to test their *Imān* in several ways. When it was decided to take the fight outside of Madinah, the people of weak faith and the hypocrites withdrew. This segregated the true Muslims from the hypocrites. Then some of those who were instructed to guard a strategic position disobeyed the Prophet's orders and engaged in the collection of war booty resulting in the Muslims' severe setback. The Muslims

were taught the painful lesson that they cannot attain victory unless they are disciplined and obey the orders of the Prophet. The purpose of *Jihād* is to annihilate the forces of evil and not to concentrate on collecting material goods.

The victory at Badr created a sense of false security and the Muslims thought that they would always be victorious whatever the odds. This was not healthy thinking and did not truly reflect the realities of life where there are successes as well as failures and setbacks. Thus, Uhud was such an *ibtīlā'*, test, to teach them these lessons.

The true believers came out with firmer faith and they were ready to fight and die in the way of Allah. The hypocrites on the other hand were exposed as excuse seekers remaining safe within Madinah away from the battlefield. They were ignorant and foolish as Allah warns them that they cannot escape death even if they hide in a secure fortress. The Muslims also learnt the lesson of complete obedience to the Prophet (*saws*) which is the prerequisite of *īmān*.

Shūrā (Consultation)

Shūrā, the consultation process, occupies a pivotal role in the Islamic way of life and particularly in the political field. In this *Sūrah* the Prophet (*saws*) is instructed to consult his Companions (3: 159). In *Sūrah al-Shūrā* while extolling the characteristics of believers it also says: "*Their affairs are conducted by mutual consultation*" (42: 38). From these verses and many *ahādith* on this topic, it emerges that those who are in command should consult the people their decisions will affect when deciding a course of action. In the political field, while conducting the affairs of state this system is contrary to the despotic regimes of dictators and kings. It is more akin to the democratic process but not quite so. In a democracy, sovereignty resides in the will of the masses

as we have already observed above, in an Islamic political system Allah is the Sole Sovereign and His Sovereignty cannot be shared by anyone.

It should be noted here that the instruction to consult is given to the Prophet (*saws*) who receives revelation from God and hence has no need to consult others. This does not mean however that the consultation referred to was just a token process to honour his Companions. As Imām Abū Bakr al-Jassās explains:

If people knew that their views would not be considered and the consultation would not have any effect on the outcome of the affair then this cannot be considered as an honour. The fact is that although the Prophet (*saws*) was guided by revelation and a direction of work was set for him it was the wisdom and mercy of Allah that many matters were left to his judgement and discretion. In such matters he needed the opinions of others and in these he was directed to consult. (*Ahkām al-Qur'ān* as quoted in Muftī Muḥammad Shafī' *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 2, p.221.)

This view is also supported if we consider the Qur'ānic instruction: "*Their affairs are conducted by mutual consultation*" (42: 38). This does not mean that after the consultation the majority view can be ignored. This would be altogether contrary to this instruction.

It is also the duty of those who are consulted to give their sincere opinion without any fear or favour. They should not be swayed by any personal or other motive. Consultation is a sacred trust and it is obligatory to fulfil this duty faithfully.

The role of *shūrā* is applicable in all other spheres of life – social, domestic and economic. No specific form of consultation is prescribed. Islam being a universal and eternal way of life, the

mode of consultation may vary in time and place. We can observe this in the process of the election of the first four *Khalafas*. Different forms of consultation were used in their appointments. There can be various forms of seeking consultation: a direct election or through a college of representatives or using any other suitable way. This flexibility can cater for anything that society finds acceptable.

The Relevance of *Āl 'Imrān* in Our Time

At present Muslims seem to be defeated intellectually, politically and socially. They are divided and disintegrated, feeling low, weak, uncertain, humiliated and overawed by the forces of their adversaries. They are being persecuted by unbelievers all over the world. Their lives, properties and honour are under attack from all sides. Their mosques are desecrated and their *madrasahs* are in disarray.

The Muslim *Ummah* is being torn apart from within as well. Infighting on issues of nationality, language, schools of *fiqh*, race, etc. is rampant in the Muslim societies of many countries. The reason for this sorry state of affairs not far to seek. The majority of the Muslim masses are uneducated, living in poverty and squalor. They have an emotional attachment to Islam but their political and religious leaders exploit them in the name of religion. Thus, they are unable to exert any power to change their situation.

Muslim governments are under the domination of the elite group of Western-educated oligarchs or hereditary rulers who are manipulated by different world powers. They undermine the revival of Islamic teachings and culture. Some outwardly pay only lip-service to Islam and are unwilling to implement its ideology into the lives of the nation. Muslims themselves are disobeying the laws of Allah (*swt*). Then there are the hypocrites among them who are more dangerous than their enemies.

So what is the guidance from Allah to deal with this situation? We can see in the whole *Sūrah* that the enemies of Islam not only fight with traditional arms and armaments. There is also an ideological war going on. There are conspiracies and doubts undermining the unity of the *Ummah*. The enemy knows it will only succeed when it destroys the faith of the Muslims. Its weapon is to keep a hold on Muslim governments by supporting those in power who are sympathetic to their cause. As the age of colonial domination is now over, there are new ways of controlling countries by economic domination and political manoeuvrings. As the vast majority of Western scholars dominate the intellectual field, their academic pursuits and research are geared to make the Islamic faith ineffective by creating doubts and dissension among believers. Thus, today as it was yesterday, the fighting is not only on the battlefield but also in the field of ideology. Muslims have to win the ideological war too.

The weakness of the Muslim *Ummah* is evident for all to see. The reasons for its decline are mentioned above. During recent conflicts in Palestine, Bosnia, Kosova, Kashmir and Chechnya when a section of the *Ummah* was struggling against their enemies we witnessed the apathy of the Muslim *Ummah* and of Muslim governments.

They were in a deep slumber. Their inability to help and to deliver any support to the Muslim destitute showed their apathy and lack of determination. They were more interested in preserving and caring for their own self-interests rather than helping and alleviating the sufferings of the Muslims in most parts of the world.

Sūrah Āl 'Imrān was revealed in 3 A.H/625 C.E. after the severe setback suffered at the Battle of Uhud, but within five years, having learnt their lesson, the Muslims marched victoriously to establish Islamic rule in Makkah in 8 A.H/ 630 C.E. If we can also

learn similar lessons from our defeats and humiliations and take up the challenges we are faced with we can also be victorious, *Inshā' Allāh*.

Let us then summarise the guidance given in this *Sūrah*:

1. We have to have firm faith and strong conviction in the attributes of our Creator, the Living, the Self-sustaining, Eternal, Exalted in Might, Lord of Retribution.
2. Our adversaries want to lead us astray, so we have to be on our guard.
3. To succeed, we require *taqwā* (God consciousness), *ṣabr* (patience) and brotherhood.
4. We are required to perform our duty of *amr bi'l m'arūf wa al-nahī 'anil munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil).
5. If we suffer setbacks we should not lose heart and fall into despair but instead have firm faith. If Allah's help is with us none can overcome us.

Our real goal should be seeking the pleasure of Allah and we should not be attracted and distracted by the glitter of this world. The qualities we require to achieve our goal are:

Taqwa (God consciousness); *Sabr* (patience); *Infāq fī Sabīl Allāh* (spending in the Way of Allah); Restraining of anger; Pardoning wrongdoers; Seeking *istighfār* (forgiveness) from Allah.

Armed with these qualities, firm determination and faith in Allah (*swt*), *Inshā' Allāh* this *Ummah* can regain its past glories. This is the message of *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*. May Allah help us achieve our aims (*Āmīn*).

These are the ones who pray: "Our Lord! We have indeed accepted the faith. Forgive us our sins and keep us safe from the torments of the fire." They are the patient in adversity, the true to their word, the devoted who spend in the cause of Allah, and those who pray for forgiveness at the time of dawn (Āl 'Imrān 3: 16-17).

Further Reading

For those who want to study the entirety of *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān* in detail, the following selection of readings are suggested. As few commentaries of the Qur'ān are available in English, works in Arabic and Urdu are also included.

Guides to Studying the Qur'ān

- Khurram Murad: *Way to the Qur'ān*. Markfield, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1985.
- Qazi Ashfaq Ahmad: *Words that Moved the World*. Markfield, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999.
- Muḥammad al-Ghazālī: *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'ān*. Herndon, Va.: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000.
- Faruq Sherif: *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'ān*. Reading: Ithaca, 1995.
- Nuqūsh (*Qur'ān Number*). Vol. No. 143, 1998. Lahore: Nuqūsh Press. 2 Vols. so far published. (Urdu)

On *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*

- Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī: *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*; tr. and ed. by Zafar Ishaq Ansari. Markfield, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1995. Vol. I, pp. 229-310.

- Sayyid Quth: *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*; tr. and ed. by Adil Salahi and Ashur Shamis. Markfield, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2000. Vol. 2: *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*.
- Mahmoud M. Ayoub: *The Qur'ān and its Interpreters*. Vol. 2: *The House of 'Imrān*. Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York Press, 1992.
- Abu'l Kalām Āzād: *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. Ed. and tr. by Syed Abdul Latif. Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1990. 4 Vols.
- 'Abdul Mājid Daryabādī: *The Glorious Qur'ān*. Markfield, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2001.
- Muhammad Asad: *The Message of the Qur'ān*. Makkah: Muslim World League and Islamic Centre, Geneva, 1964, Vol. 1.
- 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī: *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*. New and revised ed. Beltsville, Maryland, Amana Publications, 1999.
- Amin Ahsan Islāhī: *Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān*. Lahore: Dār al-Ishā'at Islāmiyah, 1967, Vol.1 (Urdu).
- Muhammad 'Alī al-Šiddīqī Kāndhalawī: *Ma'ālim al-Qur'ān*. Saikot: Idārah Ta'limāt-e-Qur'ān, 1976-77. Vols. 2-3. (Urdu).
- Mufti Muhammad Shafī' Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān. Karachi: Idārah al-Ma'ārif, 1974. Vol.2 (Urdu).
- Isma'il Ibn Kathīr: *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1970. 7 Vols. (Arabic) and the English translation published by Dārussalam Publishers, Riyadh, 2000. In 10 Vols.
- Muhammad al-Qurṭubī: *al-Jamī' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān*. Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1967. 20 Vols. (Arabic).
- Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Cairo: Al-Matba'ah al-Bahiyah, n.d., 32 Vols. (Arabic).

Abdur Rashid Siddiqui gained an honours degree in Economics and Politics from the University of Bombay and has a law degree from the same University. He completed his postgraduate study in Librarianship in London and was elected to the Associateship of the Library Association. He worked as an Information Librarian at the University of Leicester from 1966 until his retirement in 1997. He is the author of a number of books and articles on a variety of subjects. His recent books published by the Islamic Foundation are *Lift Up Your Hearts: A collection of 30 Khutbah for Friday Prayer* and *Key to al-Fātihah: Understanding the Basic Concepts*.

His forthcoming publications are:

- *Keywords of the Qur'an*
- *Nawā-e-Benawā: an anthology of Urdu poetry*

He has been deeply involved in Islamic activities for many years, such as Secretary General of the UK Islamic Mission and Chairman of the Shura Council of the Islamic Society of Britain.

Key to Āl 'Imrān is patterned upon the late Brother Khurram Murad's pioneering work of making the Holy Qur'an accessible to the masses and facilitate its understanding. His *Key to al-Baqarah* provides the overview of the longest *Sūrah* of the Qur'an elucidating its main concerns and places the *Sūrah* in the overall context of the eternal guidance embodied in the Qur'an. Following his methodology and pattern, the author has painstakingly gleaned valuable material from authentic *tafāsīr* in Arabic and Urdu and presented a thematic study of *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*. Being familiar with the mindset and intellectual needs of the English-speaking young generation of Muslims in the West, he has made a commendable effort in drawing them closer to the Divine Book of Guidance.

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